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So Much For 'Billygate'

A Senate subcommittee that has been investigating the Billy Carter affair has concluded unanimously that high officials in the administration were guilty of neither criminal activity nor deliberate wrongdoing in the matter. Instead, it concluded that Attorney General Civiletti, CIA Director Turner and National Security Adviser Brzezinski exhibited poor judgment and that President Carter was "ill-advised" to involve his brother as an intermediary with a Libyan official who was being asked to intercede with Iran in the hostage crisis.

That is not exactly the bombshell that the public was led to believe would be forthcoming from "Billygate." At the most, it proves only that where there's smoke, there's smoke — and not necessarily anything more. This much is beyond dispute: That Billy Carter, in many ways a pathetic, failed figure, accepted \$220,000 from the Libyans in the form of "loans"; that the administration, deliberately or not,

enhanced his standing with the Libyans by bringing him in on the hostage discussions; that he was under investigation by the Justice Department and that he finally registered as a foreign agent after the attorney general had discussed the case with the president. Whatever his or the Libyans' intent, the fact is that his activities did not influence government policy toward that country.

With regard to his belated registration as a Libyan agent, the fact also is that the public interest was served by his abiding by the law. Far from encouraging a disregard for law — the hallmark of Watergate — the administration in this case seems to have nudged him into compliance. We would agree that President Carter has more appropriate diplomatic instruments at his disposal than brother Billy. That the sound and fury of the investigation has produced nothing more substantial, is testimony to the essential emptiness of the whole case.